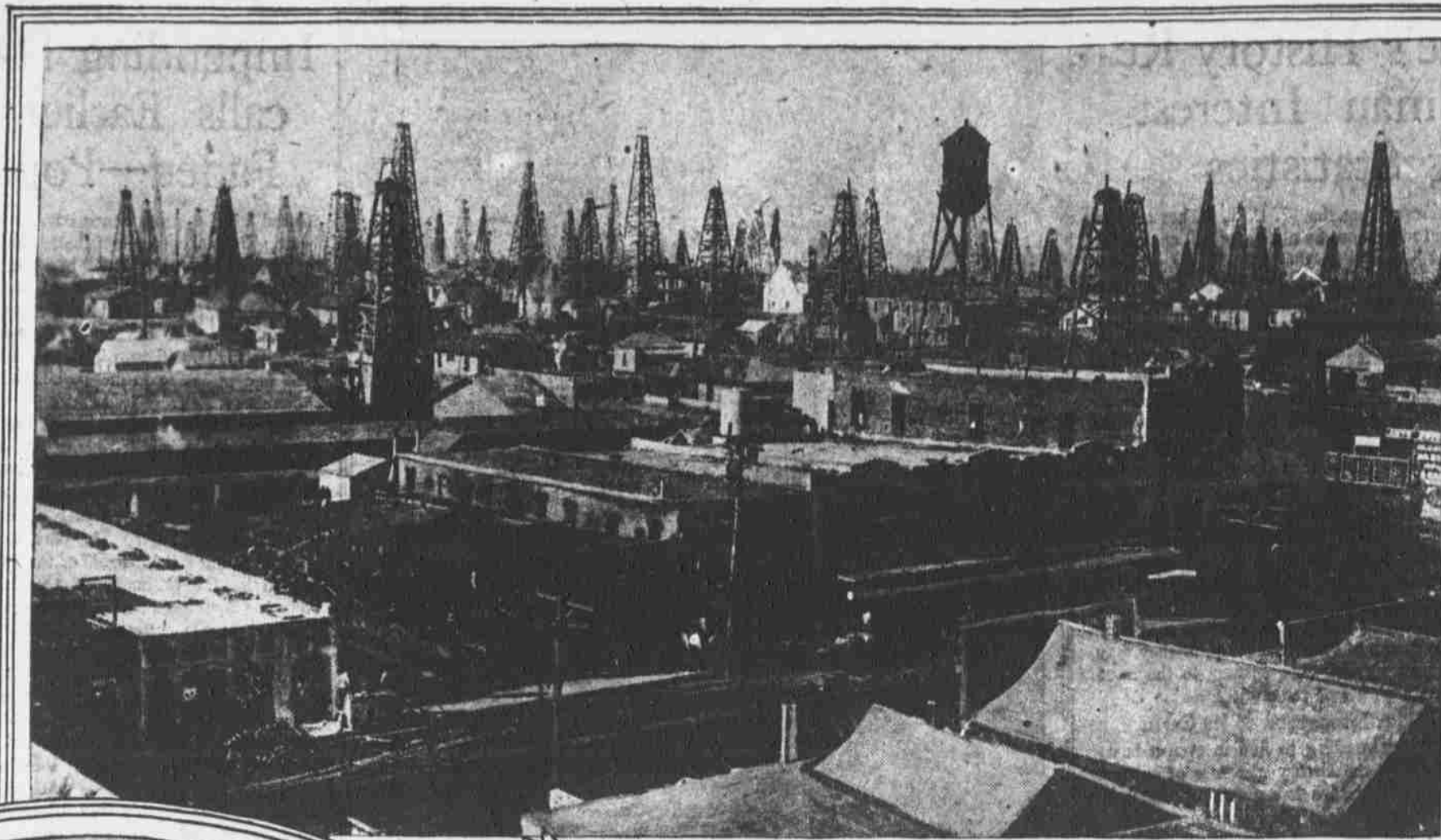


Spirit of '49 Flashing Forth Anew in Texas Oil Rush

Southwest Now Presents Same Melodrama of Sudden Wealth and Sudden Death That Pioneers Knew in Days of the Gold Craze

THE days of the Forty-niners have come again in Louisiana, Oklahoma, and most of all in breezy Texas. The gold rush of our grandfathers has given place to the oil rush of to-day. Instead of prairie schooners these argonauts fare forth in Pullman trains (chronically four to six hours late)—and instead of prospectors on "grub stakes" there are oil drillers at any number of real dollars per day; but the wild, adventurous spirit is the same and the reckless spending of hastily won fortunes and also the flat fights and the gun play!

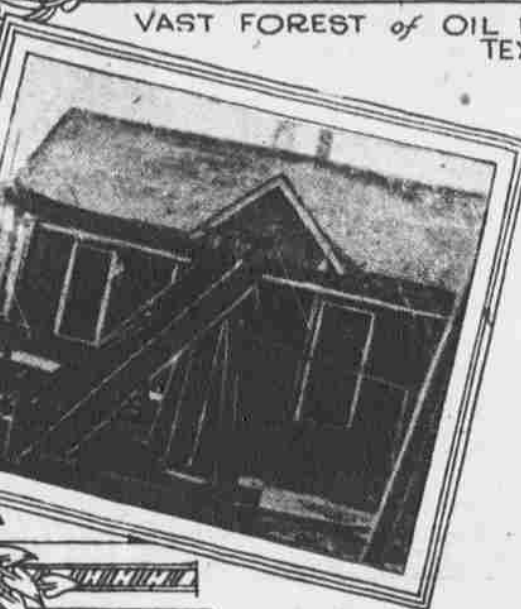
It is this same adventurous spirit, this recklessness and taking of long chances that attracts so many old campaigners of the A. E. F. to the oil fields. If you are



FAST FOREST OF OIL DERRICKS MARKS EACH TEXAS OIL TOWN



TYPICAL STREET IN TEXAS OIL BOOM TOWN SNAPSHOT IN BURKBURNETT



HAVE YOU A LITTLE OIL WELL IN YOUR HOME?

right" you may be a pauper to-day and a millionaire to-morrow. And then again, you may be dead—if some "bad hombre" who has been toying too long with the wood alcohol happens to take a dislike to the shape of your nose. Burk-Waggoner, the newest and toughest of the Texas oil towns, has seen as many as three shooting affairs in an evening. You may, too, if you so desire, lose all your oil holdings in one little poker game any evening. Quarter limit isn't popular in that sector.

Many From the A. E. F.

All this looks good indeed to Corporal Smith and Sergeant Jones, who have been used to gambling with Jerry for tolerably high stakes and who now find bookkeeping on a shiny office stool a little tame. The oil towns are khaki towns, all dressed up in samples of O. D. issue. Here it's a blue serge suit with a campaign hat, puttees and field shoes; there an army mackinaw over corduroys, and yonder an aviator's leather coat and goggles perched on the front seat of a rattling Ford. Even the office men are A. E. F. graduates; yonder snappy stenographer wears a monogrammed silk shirt, but his breeches are O. D., and he still limps a little from that bit of shrapnel that he stopped in the Argonne.

"These boys are surely getting a good start in Texas," beamed the friendly old chap who showed the writer over Burk-burnett. "Texas sent over \$9,000, and she wants to do 'em right now that they're back. See those two?" pointing to two fellows in half uniform and half civies, rattling along on a new two ton truck. "They've just bought that and started carrying supplies from Wichita to the field. I started 'em—gave 'em their first load this morning to help the good work along."

Fort Worth, that thriving young burg which calls itself "the Chicago of the Southwest," proved to be an ideal starting point for oil investigators, both for geographical reasons and because a few days spent in Fort Worth insure one to hardships and prepare one for anything.

"Don't expect to get a room in any Fort Worth hotel," some one had warned me. "They hang you on a hook down there."

He was about right. You surge into town at midnight on a train that was due at 7:30. You then storm the Westbrook, conceded to be the best hotel. A bored hotel clerk tells you with a yawn that he can't find any trace of your reservation; come around to-morrow, if you like. Well, that's all right! You have already learned from the *Encyclopedia Britannica* that Fort Worth has thirty-one parks and it's a perfectly lovely night.

Eventually, if you know the Mayor or have a letter of introduction from John D. Rockefeller, you and your baggage are established—but not at the Westbrook—in a fairly good room, with running water and electric light, for a mere \$3 a day without bath. This is cheap.

Meals are cheaper in New York—

but nowhere near so good. Quantity, and not quality, is the cry of the husky driller. When it comes to buying clothes! My! My! A fifty dollar suit travels from Dallas, two hours away, and accumulates a twenty-five dollar raise on the way. A fur coat one could acquire for \$125 on Fifth avenue bounds up to \$500 in the Chicago of the Southwest. On any sort of women's clothes the sky is the limit; for the wives of the new oil millionaires must spend their money somehow, and what could be sweeter than crepe de Chine lingerie at fifteen dollars the garment, gold lace hats at forty dollars, nineteen dollar silk shirts for hubby and thousand dollar suits of pale mauve furniture for the new stucco bungalow?

Pecans at Two for a Nickel.

Even apples cost 10c. apiece, and pecans—called pe-caws in the South—are two (2) for a nickel, and the Texan's favorite "five gallon hat" of pale cream beaver sets him back \$75.

Fort Worth in its present halfway stage between a cattle town and a metropolis is fascinating. One story shacks lean drunkenly against white marble skyscrapers; battered bicycles sprawl on the curbsone to trip up the oil millionaires, as they alight from their shiny new motors, and costly imported cars and rusty, dusty Fords jostle one another along the two main streets. Every seventh person owns an automobile and is always willing to give any of the other six a ride. You can't go a block out of town on foot without the cheery offer of a lift.

And the Westbrook, with "Oil Leases and Drilling Properties" occupying nooks of its lobby, shows the same mingling of types; ermine capes and tobacco juice; hip boots and Paris hats; prospectors in corduroys and tall crowned beaver hats, figuring the profit on 15,000 barrels a day at \$2.50

a barrel, and immaculate gentlemen in English lounge suits who can advise you about something good in oil stock—and would appreciate a small loan. This, too, is the habitat of the "lease bond"—usually a dark, lean, mysterious lady, sniffing about for desirable properties to buy.

The native Texan is delightful—so simple, kind and friendly, so gallant and hospitable! Lean, tanned, wiry, with far seeing gray eyes and aquiline features, he is good looking even with a balding haircut! He is partial to tall leather boots with elaborate leaf and scroll decorations, and to lurid silk shirts, ties and handkerchiefs. He is slow and hesitant in speech, camouflaging opinion under such phrases as "He's somewhere near about right!"

The typical Texas girl wears a nobby leather coat, topped by a wool tam-o'-shanter of any brilliant hue. Old ladies trot about in tobogganing caps, and there's an occasional Southern dandy in sunbonnet and calico dress; but neither these nor feminine heads swathed in gaudy mufflers nor the most a la Paroo costume imaginable in contrast attracts any stares from the courteous Texan.

The Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce, as usual, has the army and navy in full charge. The ex-C. P. O. quoted me this interesting paragraph from a railroad folder:

"The story of oil in Texas is like a page from the Arabian Nights, in which the wildest dreams of wealth come true. For little more than a year it has been in the writing, and it is still far from complete, but in number of people involved and in the amount of wealth realized it has been many times greater and more spectacular than was the romantic gold rush of '49."

From Burk-burnett, near the extreme northern boundary, straight down through the centre of the State and on to the coast

Tampico oil fields in Mexico, extends a geological formation known as the Pennsylvania stratum. Here thousands of men and women have grown rich over night, many among their number having visited Texas for the first time a year ago for the sole purpose of enjoying the mild climate and the winter sports."

The ex-sergeant furnished an anti-climax to this by offering some oil stock, as he had some to give away. Unsuccessful in this generous effort he presented the writer with two stout pamphlets entirely filled with statistics indicating that Fort Worth was first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of the cattle, grain or oil man.

The editor of the *Legionnaire*, a flourishing young publication well worth the attention of Legion members in the East, proved a mine of information. He explained that in many cases, even in Texas, the promoters made the millions while the original owners of the property had sold out for a couple of thousands. Contrariwise, there were other cases where the farm owner got a goodly sum for his oil rights and the bloated capitalists, having spent \$10,000 or more in sinking a well, found no oil.

Beaumont was the first oil field to be developed in Texas—the Spindle Top properties, now played out, though many people expect them to produce again. It was at Spindle Top that "oil maggots," as they are sometimes malaprop'd, made frantic but unsuccessful efforts to buy up a cemetery where they wanted to dig wells. The only result was a popular and widely circulated bit of verse called "Not For Sale." Beaumont is strictly a town of millionaires to-day, and yet there is only one real hotel, and that as unwilling to take you in as the Westbrook at Fort Worth.

Tent Hotel at Wichita.

And now, all aboard for Wichita Falls—usually referred to briefly as "Wichita." The Denver line takes you there from Fort Worth, and a branch road runs to Burk-burnett, the actual oil field. Hotel accommodations were even scarcer at Wichita than in Fort Worth, incredible though that seemed. It's at Wichita Falls that the famous "tent hotel" has been doing business. Some enterprising beings bought up a lot of surplus army tents, army coats and blankets. For \$2 and up the shelterless "oil maggot" could rent a cot for a specified number of hours; but he must be out by 8 A. M. to make room for the next fellow.

The Wichita station was full of "types"—drillers, incredibly smudged of face, in corduroy trousers, tall sombreros and gaudy mufflers, "just like the movies" was one's first glad thought. A sort of *Miracle Man*, with wild curly hair and beard, like birds' nests, was stumping about on a knotted stick. In one corner dozed a group of Mexicans—the grandmother, brown and wrinkled, looking at least a hundred; the father and mother, a flock of small peons and many baskets and bundles. In the doorway fluttered an old lady in a real,

honest-to-goodness black bonnet such as our grandmothers used to wear.

Wichita Falls itself proved to be an amazingly snappy little city, clean, new, up to the minute, with well paved streets, skyscrapers going up everywhere, modern office and hotel buildings, stores full of the newest designs in furniture and interior decorations. Its citizens are justly proud of it. "We've got the money here," confided a clerk in one of the strictly modern drug stores, "and we're spending it. We're going to make Wichita the finest city in the Southwest if we have our way."

Flocks of automobiles were in waiting, to take the "oil person" who had missed that seven o'clock train, out to Burk-burnett—for a sufficient inducement—but there was also a motor truck setting out on that sixteen mile jaunt to a nearby supply house. The writer booked passage on this in order to ask the driver questions, such as "Who were Burk and Burnett?" "Why is all that cotton still hanging on the bushes?" and "Doesn't all this oil soaking into the ground cause fires sometimes?"

Answers to the Questions.

All these and many more were answered satisfactorily as we jolted along over incredibly muddy roads. "Burk and Burnett were one person, and all of that was his last name only. He was one of the original farmer settlers in the Burk-burnett townsite, named for him." Oil was discovered on his property in July, 1918, at a depth of only 1734 feet, and he died recently, a millionaire many times over.

"The cotton is still hanging on the bushes—acres of it—because the unfortunate farmers could find no one to pick it." They offered as much as \$3.50 a hundred pounds—the rate in the old days having been 50 cents—and a good worker can pick 300 pounds in a day; but who could be bothered, with oil wells "coming in" every minute and bringing one the wealth of Aladdin's lamp?

"Yes, there are fires enough. Rules against smoking are posted up, but no one pays any attention to them." The oil from the "gushers" runs out faster than the pipes can take care of it, and soaks the ground and floats on the ponds and rivers. In November, 1919, lightning struck a "gusher" that was just "coming in" and caused a fire that did \$80,000 worth of damage and suffocated gas-man in his bed half a mile away before it was finally smothered with sand.

Ranger, an older field, has attracted the big companies, while Burk-burnett is given over to the small operators, and this makes it far more interesting. Everything is on a "shoestring." Drilling a well costs from \$12,000 to \$18,000 at Burk-burnett, but you can follow the custom there and have one in your front yard by getting Grandpa, Uncle James, Cousin Maria and all the neighbors to come in on the proposition.

Small investors have also reaped a harvest from Burk-burnett stock. There is a story of a newsboy in Charleston who took a chance on some stock selling at 25 cents a share. It began to rise, and he hastily bought up all he could. He cleared \$50,000, and at the end of two hectic years he resumed selling papers on the streets of Charleston.

Burk-Waggoner, two miles northwest of Burk-burnett, and more commonly called "Northwest, Extension," has been in the limelight since April, 1919, when its first well was "brought in" with a flush production of over 2,000 barrels.

Plenty of these "pumpers" were all along the route—little steam pumps chugging away foolishly, apparently in the middle of nowhere. We saw also a brand new derrick whose well had not yet "come in" ("come out" would seem so much more appropriate!), and down beside the road there was a lonely grave, with a cactus respectfully planted on it. The inscription on the wooden headboard reads: "Here lies the man who asked the last question."

It was a flat, prairie country through which we were bumping along—the roads

Many Veterans of the A. E. F. Among Those Venturing Into the Reckless Gamble Where Sky Is the Limit—Successes and Failures

of soft black mud diversified with deep ruts. In the fields masses of tumbleweed, a little corn stubble and acres of abandoned cotton vied with the sinister cactus plant in five or six varieties. Herds of horses roamed at large or peacefully penetrated into monster straw stacks, which seemed to provide both food and lodging. Wheat straw, explained the old driver—it's a great country for wheat, though few people bother with it in the oil regions. A few scrubby trees, with the usual nests of mistletoe, indicated the water courses. Traces of oil showed in every stream and puddle.

"Wait until you get near the town," chuckled the driver. "The mud's waist deep there and the oil in it makes it sticky as glue."

Occasionally there would be a cluster of wooden cabins such as the Southern darky lives in. These, for the time being, are the mansions of the "maggots." As a rule they boasted one door and one window, a bench at the end bearing a washtub and a basin, and in the yard a pile of soft coal—the only kind available and which sells for about \$20 a ton.

Next came a dreary little cemetery, whose inmates, disappointingly enough, had succumbed to the "flu" and not to gunshot wounds. Each grave was weirdly adorned with old plates, pieces of colored glass and bottle tops. One unconsciously looked for a tin, beaded wreath, a la France.

Then the derricks came in sight—hundreds of spindling wooden structures pointing skyward. It was disappointing not to see stranded airplanes roosting on their tops, for in Fort Worth it was said that flying to the oil fields was losing its popularity—"too many people getting killed that-a-way."

"Oh, yes, they fly out," said the guide. "We have one man that flies over from Dallas to Burk regular."

Somebody must be doing it, for the Curtiss company proudly boasts of 417 planes sold to one man in the Southwest and over one hundred single sales to oil men.

"Coming into town," grunted the guide a little later. "You can tell it by the road," and we descended into a rut about four feet deep to prove his words. And "some" town it proved to be. On the outskirts fat gray meadow larks flapped from fence posts amid the desolation. Here and there an old white farmhouse stood incongruously among the forest of derricks, with its neat white shell paths and its grove of evergreens.

Ideal for the Movies.

We were now on the main street, an ideal location for a movie company "shooting" Western stuff. Flat wagons clattered along under one mule power and regular old time cowboys galloped their piebald ponies recklessly through the soft mud. The roadway was lined with one story shacks, made more imposing by huge top-heavy signs with such legends as "J. W. Blank, General Merchandise. Beds and Short Orders."

Saying goodbye to the chariteer the writer thought of the old question, "When do we eat?" and ventured into a pocket-size luncheon, surprisingly clean and dainty, where he found the girl proprietor was engaged in argument with a rather soiled patron.

"Only a little over a day since I left this suit case here and now you want to charge me another ten cents!" he growled. "Profiteering, like everybody else!"

"Isn't it a shame?" she sighed when he had gone out muttering. "I get that all day long. Everybody is making millions here, and even a cook in one of these little lunchrooms gets sixty dollars a week, and yet when I charge ten cents for a cigar that is eight in Wichita Falls, and that I have to pay for having brought over, there's always an argument over that two cents. Sister and I would never stay if we didn't have \$1,500 invested in this little cubby-hole, and not even insurance on it. We can't get it, and we could lose everything in ten minutes if a fire started."

"We never go out at night, it's so wild and woolly here then; and this mud! Why the other day a ten-year-old boy got stuck in it up to his armpits, right in the middle of the main street. Two men had to go out with boards and rescue him, just like they were pulling out some one who'd fallen through the ice."

"You know we came down here from Oklahoma," she went on sadly. "Invested all we had and now we can't get away. Why, back home you can get a lovely new house with bath and everything for \$14 a month, and here we have a little old four room shack at Wichita Falls—sister and I call it Liza—and that old thing is rented at \$100 a month. It's a shame. And the worst of it is we could get more, but we haven't the heart to take it."

And there you are. The sky is the limit, money flies about like leaves in V. Williams, and the happy ex-buck of the A. E. F., pondering on that old problem, "How many wells make a river?" discovers a new answer: 1-20 x 1 well = 1 millionaire (in O. D. issue).